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FASTING,
FASTS, AND FASTERS:
OR,
A SKETCH
OF THE
RISE, PROGRESS, AND RESULTS
OF
FASTING
IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"THE CHURCH PRINCIPLES OF NICE, ROME, AND OXFORD,"
&c., &c.

LONDON:
NISBET & CO., BERNERS STREET.
MANCHESTER:
GILLETT, 2, BROWN STREET; PRATT, BRIDGE STREET;
AND GALT & CO., ST. ANN'S SQUARE.
1845.

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FASTING, &c.

“ The highest argument of a weak mind is, not to feel the force of present evidence.”—B.P. HORSLEY.

LORD BACON, with his wonted penetration, remarks that, “ The causes of superstition are pleasing rites and ceremonies ; excess of outward and pharisaical holiness, over great reverence for traditions which cannot but load the church ; the stratagems of prelates for their own ambition and lucre ; the favouring too much good intentions, which openeth the gate to conceits and novelties ; the taking an aim at divine matters by human which cannot but breed mixture of imaginations.”* These few words state the origin of all the errors which have corrupted Christianity and fastened on her spiritual worship a yoke scarcely less tolerable than that formerly borne by the Jews.

“ The service of the Lord is perfect freedom,” but he who is bound in the trammels of superstition and has surrendered the *right* of acting and *thinking* for himself to the bidding of his fellow-creatures, no longer “ stands fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made him free.”

* See *Essay on Superstition*.

A church has the right to decree rites and ceremonies for the ordering and maintenance of religious worship, but none may enforce as a positive rule, that which has no authority nor warrant from scripture, but which has arisen solely from the policy, enthusiasm, or morbid feelings of *uninspired* men.

The obligations to *pray* and to *fast*, rest upon very different foundations ; in the gospel, the *former* is distinctly commanded as a duty, and recommended as a privilege arising out of the relations subsisting between God and his rational creatures, whilst the *latter* is neither recommended, decreed, nor approved by Christ. *Prayer* is the continuous link between God and man ; *Fasting*, the unasked, untaught offering of pain and misery ; “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a contrite heart,” not an exhausted, worn-out frame.

Could the Saviour’s fast of forty days ever be meant as an example for imitation by the church, for, “He was led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil,”* and that event is specifically called “The Temptation,” and ended in a conflict with the power of darkness, whereas Christians are desired to “Resist the devil,”† and not told to rush into scenes and conditions which would invite his approach. Instead of protracted abstinence being a time of strength, it is invariably known to be that of weakness.

“Satan seems to have expected to overcome *the man Christ Jesus*” in the hour of his exhaustion, but although the evil one found it impossible to prevail against “*The Son of God*,” who is not aware that in all other beings, and in all ordinary cases when the body is subdued by hunger, the rational powers of the mind fail.

* Matt. iv. 1. † James iv. 7.

Esau sold his birthright for a mess of pottage when he came in faint from the field.*

As it is physically impossible for the nature of man to sustain a fast of forty days without miraculous aid, so it would be morally wrong to attempt it. One of the petitions in the Lord's Prayer is so intimately connected with another as to become almost synonymous, for when temptation is avoided there is deliverance from evil.

May it not be intended, among other important lessons, to guard mankind against presuming to suspend the mode which God has deemed requisite for supporting and invigorating their frames, and to show what must be the consequences to *mortal* man in similar circumstances, if even their *divine* Lord and Master *seemed* at such a time of (*supposed*) diminished personal strength open to the attacks of Satan.

Instead of Christ teaching by either practice or precept, that men should "fast twice in the week," or observe stated seasons of abstinence, he purposely worked miracles to supply food to others. When great numbers followed him, he did not require them to fast, but lest they should suffer from hunger he fed five thousand people with five barley loaves and two small fishes,† and at the marriage of Cana in Galilee, he even furnished miraculously the means of festivity.‡

The prayer which our Lord left for his church, contains the petition "Give us this day our daily bread," and clearly evinces that he taught and expected all persons should eat necessary food every day, and this phrase alone might suffice to show that He had not commanded any Christian to fast for a single day.

* See note 1. † Matt. xiv. ‡ John ii.

He who fasts, must not use Christ's form of sound words, for it would be a mockery to ask for that which it was deemed a paramount duty and service to go without; that prayer distinctly implies that fasting is no part of Christianity.*

In seasons of deep affliction, the Jews were generally wont to *fast and pray*, and as in the time of Christ, all things were done according to established and ancient custom, so it was only what might have been expected, when the Lord said to those who brought the deaf and dumb spirit to him "This kind can come forth by nothing but by prayer and fasting,"† yet we know that the Lord had not been engaged in any act of mortification, for he had been exhibiting his glory in the transfiguration, it is therefore probable the parents of the afflicted child had been engaged in this preparation for the cleansing according to *Jewish practice* in cases of sorrow and anxiety; for during Christ's abode on earth the Mosaic dispensation was in full force, and all its religious forms and ceremonies were in continual use, except amongst his immediate followers, who neither fasted, nor washed before eating, although each were national observances. The mysterious possession of human beings by devils is inexplicable, but as the appalling visitation is now removed from mankind, it cannot be requisite to continue or institute fasting for the purpose of exorcism.

There is but one instance recorded in scripture of Christ ever fasting, but there are innumerable details given of his partaking of food at any time, and with few or many individuals,‡ and both by precept and example he followed and enjoined the usual mode which

* Note 2. † Mark ix. 29. ‡ Note 3.

the Creator had deemed fit to appoint, as the means to sustain health and life. It is very evident, that Christ's manner of living was totally opposed to that of the Pharisical devotees, who complained that he was "Gluttonous and a wine bibber,"* and so far from his general conduct being a model of exhibited mortifications and rigid abstinence, it is seen that he was perpetually reproached by the self-righteous for his graciousness, in "sitting at meat" with publicans and sinners, and eating and drinking at feasts.†

So diametrically opposite were the habits of Jesus, to those taught and followed by the Nicene Church and the Monks of the desert, that "the disciples of John came to him saying, why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?"‡

Jesus said, that when he was with them there was no occasion to mourn, but they should fast when he was gone, yet there is *no proof* that even after his departure from them they did fast, but much on the contrary side of the question, to show they *did not*. The *entire absence of evidence* in either the precepts or practice of the Lord, and also of his apostles, that they united fasting with their continual intercessions and thanksgivings, may be deemed conclusive of the fact, that what they never observed themselves, they did not expect to be done by others. Our divine Master, by his words and conduct plainly demonstrated, that frequent fasting is inconsistent with the genius and active duties of christianity.

This idea may be more fully understood and established, by briefly surveying the concluding scenes of the Saviour's public ministry, which period is now

* Matt. xi. 19. † John xii. 2. ‡ Matt. ix. 14.

commemorated in "Passion week," and is held in some communions as a strict fast; but that time was not spent by Christ either in solitude or abstinence, but even to the very hour in which "he arose and was betrayed into the hands of sinners," he was sat at the table and with many persons, was participating in the *Feast* of the Passover, which was always considered a high festival, and kept by eating the flesh of a Lamb and drinking wine, in large companies.*

In the gospel there are full and explicit accounts of the mode in which the Lord passed most of the week preceding his death. On the Sabbath, six days before that event, Christ went to Bethany. "There they made him a supper, and Martha served, but Lazarus *was one of them* that sat at the table with him."† This passage proves there was no fast being kept by the Lord, and that he was eating in company with several persons, and with *women* in attendance. On the first day of the week, the Messiah entered Jerusalem in *triumph*, followed by a large concourse of people,‡ a celebration of that nature is never accompanied by fasting in any part of the world; in the evening, Jesus left the city. Monday, he went again to Jerusalem, and on his way there "he was hungry," and *would have eaten*, but the figs were not ready,§ and he went into the temple and cast out them that bought and sold, and in the evening he left the city.|| Tuesday, he returned to Jerusalem, when the disciples showed him the grandeur of the temple, and in the evening he went to the mount of Olives, where he held long discourse with those who were with him. Afterwards, "Being in Bethany, in the

* Exo. xii. 4. † John xii. 1, 2. ‡ John xii. 12.

§ Mark xi. 12, 13. || Matt. 24.

house of Simon the leper, as *he sat at meat*,” a precious box of ointment was poured on his head.* Wednesday, “Early in the morning all the people came to him in the temple to hear him.”† Thursday, “When the day of unleavened bread was come he sent Peter and John to prepare the feast.”‡ The passover was the appointed memorial of the national escape from Egyptian slavery, and the Lord’s supper was instituted as a “remembrance” to commemorate a greater deliverance from bondage. The usual ceremonies of a feast were observed on this occasion, and in the midst of it the Lord washed the disciples feet, which circumstance *could not have* happened during a fast, as in times of mourning the Jews *never washed*.

The whole period now called passion or holy week Christ was seen in public, in the temple, and in triumph; he also partook of two feasts, one at the house of Lazarus and another at the house of Simon, and twice was he anointed; these acts would not have occurred in a season of fasting, for these things were always tokens of exultation and congratulation. On the same night in which Judas betrayed his master, the Lord’s supper had been preceded by eating meat and drinking wine; this circumstance proves that it is quite contrary to the rule of the founder of the feast to receive that sacrament fasting. If the conduct of the Lord is to be the model for Christians in all practicable cases, why are the observances of passion week entirely changed from the manner in which it was spent by the Saviour, into a series of mortifications and rigorous abstinence?

That the death of Christ was necessary as an atonement for our sins, should always be a subject of humili-

* Mark. xiv. 1.—3. † Luke xxi. 38. ‡ Luke xxii.

ation, but it certainly is a matter of perpetual rejoicing and thanksgiving, that “God so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.”*

Neither during the six previous weeks, nor on the days immediately before the crucifixion was there any fasting; nor in the gospels, acts, or epistles, which are records of the past, and definite instructions for the future, is there the slightest intimation that Christ or his disciples kept passion week, Lent, or any other days as fasts.

When the Lord sent out the seventy, amongst other precise instructions for their behaviour, he desired them “To abide in the same house, *eating* and *drinking* such things as they have,”† and in every city to “Eat such things as they set before you.” If stated fasts had been necessary, these commands would have interfered with the rule, and if *fish* had been deemed more holy diet than other food, it would not have been forgotten when speaking to men, many of whom were fishermen, and who would have been gratified to find their former vocation was the means of supplying sanctity to others.

Instead of fasting being made into a *law* and exhibition of feeling, Christ most unequivocally states that such as chose to fast, are to fast “in secret that they *appear not to men* to fast,”‡ and that each individual may understand *he* is the person spoken to, the plural “ye” is changed into the singular “thou,” “when thou fastest anoint thy head,”§ (for those who fasted amongst the Jews neither anointed nor washed themselves.) “Moreover, when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites are,

* John iii. 16. † Luke x. 7.-8. ‡ Matt..vi. 18. § 17.

of a sad countenance, for they disfigure their faces that they appear unto men to fast." Thus, so far from approving or appointing fasts, or rendering seasons of peculiar devotion spectacles to men, there was a definite command for any who might wish to fast, to *beware* lest any but God should be acquainted with the deed.

In all ages the holiest men have deemed it beneficial to their souls, to have *occasional*, (but *not compulsory*) days devoted to humiliation or self-examination before God, and this may be highly useful if done without parade or exhibition to others. The mind or spirit, when fully occupied with intense emotion, whether of joy or grief, of exultation or depression, cannot partake of the usual quantity, if indeed of any food for a time, but a natural physical defect, must never be supposed to be a merit in the sight of God. But although *watching* be connected with *praying*, fasting is never commanded as a Christian addition to either one or the other. On the solemn and awful occasion when our Lord gave that important precept to his disciples, he and they had only just arisen from a meal in which the flesh of a lamb and wine had been taken. (Matt. xxvi. 41.) Again, when Christ was telling Peter, and James, John, and Andrew, of the desolation and calamity which should fall upon Jerusalem, they are desired in that time of "Affliction such as was not from the beginning of the world—neither should be again, to *watch* and to *pray*," but not the slightest hint is dropt as to *fasting* even in that season of unparalleled woe. (Mark xiii.) The apostle Paul, who was "in labours more abundant than them all," says, "Finally my brethren be strong in the Lord," "Praying with all *prayer* and *supplication* and *watch-*

ing thereunto with all perseverance.”* But whilst each is commanded to “be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord,” the very means to do this is “not to be slothful in business,”† for “if any would not work, neither should he eat,” for by labour only had he any right to distribute to the necessity of the saints or to be given to hospitality.

In the whole of the New Testament there is not the slightest order or precept for the observance of fasting in the Christian church on any day in the year, much less to bind it down to six weeks of abstinence at one time, and two days in the week for ever.

The only passage in which there is the merest reference made or implied, that there was any fasting amongst Christians, is in 1 Cor. vii. 5, and the apostle speaks there, “by permission and not by commandment.”

One of the distinguishing marks of an apostate church, which would teach “doctrines of devils,” is “commanding to abstain from meats;”‡ had abstinence from food been even enforced as a necessary duty amongst Christians, this explicit mention of the act of fasting could not have been enumerated as one of many heterodox dogmas, which would be introduced into christianity to delude men, nor could anything be called a doctrine of devils which had been taught by Christ; therefore, bishops and councils had no more right to insist upon fasting than they had to ordain hourly ablutions.

Towards the close of the second century, Victor, bishop of Rome, took upon himself to threaten the Asiatic churches with excommunication, for disagreeing with him upon the time of keeping the festival of

* Eph. vi. 18. † Rom. xii. 11. ‡ 1 Tim. iv. 3.

Easter, which assumption was disallowed, as they were not under his jurisdiction or authority. Ireneus says, “the controversy was not only upon that subject (which was never amicably settled) but upon the very form of the fast; for some suppose they ought to fast one day, others two, others more, computing forty hours of the day and night.” (Eus. B. 5. C. 24.)

An author who wrote so late as the fifth century says, “St. Paul showed the Jews were servants, but that those who followed Christ, were called to liberty;” “the apostles and gospels have nowhere imposed the yoke of servitude upon Christians,” “but have left the feast of Easter and other festivals to be honoured by their *gratitude*.” “Whereupon, that men love festivals, because they have a cessation of labour, each person has in every place *according to his own pleasure* by a certain custom, celebrated the memory of the saving passion. For *neither our Saviour nor his apostles have enjoined us by any law to observe this festival.*” “And moreover, it was not the apostles design to make laws concerning festivals, but to introduce good life and conduct.”* Experience shows, that where there are most of the former, there is always least of the latter.

The eastern and western churches have never agreed upon the time for keeping Easter; the orientals alleging the practice of St. John, the Latins that of Peter and Paul. From this strange difference, as to a matter of fact, it appears highly probable the apostles never kept such a feast as Easter, but if they did, it could not be considered by them of importance, when they disagreed upon the time of observing the anniversary, for there is

* Sec. Scholar. B. 5. C. 22.

no allusion to the commemoration in their writings. In the English translation of "the Acts," the word rendered "Easter," really signifies the Passover,* for it is very certain that Herod, a *Jew*, would not have deferred any purpose or plan, in order to keep a *Christian* festival, which would remind him of his unjust and wicked deeds.†

The ceremonial forms and rites of the Jews, can never be binding upon Christians, for they were "a figure" which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances imposed on them, until the time of reformation, ‡ But being come, "Behold! old things are passed away, all things are become new."

The Israelites (and Pagan nations also) called solemn fasts, which were intended as times of humiliation and repentance, and when they were real seasons of pious sorrow, the Lord heard their cry and answered their petitions, as in the case of the Ninevites. On the other hand, there were fasts even amongst the Jews, which were only hypocritical, profane exhibitions of devotion.

Jezebel proclaimed a fast, merely as a blind to conceal premeditated wickedness. Jehoiachim held a fast, yet scrupled not to burn the roll of prophecy at the very time he was mocking God, by an outward show of submission.§ Isaiah tells the people they "fast for strife and debate," and that their fasts were not accepted,|| but that the fasts, which the Lord chose, were "to deal thy bread to the hungry."

It is evident that the Jews fasted not only in a time of affliction, but also as a preparation for the most

* Acts xii. 4. † Note 5. ‡ Heb. ix. 10. § 1 Kings xxi. 9.

|| Jer. xxxvi. Isa. lviii. 4-6, 7.

flagrant acts of crime and violence ; this is distinctly seen in the Acts xxiii. when " More than forty men of the Jews banded themselves under a curse neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul," and so little were they ashamed of a vow and fast made for such a purpose, that " they came to the chief priests and elders" to inform them of their intention. As these persons allowed the plot to proceed, they of course approved of its design, which was only frustrated by the prudence of the captain of the Roman soldiery.

Christ knew that the fasts of the Jews were generally empty forms or displays of unreal sanctity, and as such would necessarily become the case again if they were re-established, the yoke was entirely omitted by him. In the glory of the latter day the "*fasts* shall be *cheerful feasts* of joy and gladness."*

The Pharisee, when thanking God that he was not like other men, boasted that he " fasted twice in the week," yet it availed him nothing with God. St. Matthew states, the Pharisees fasted often, but it is plainly written in the same gospel that their fasting tended to evil, and was a cloak for their hypocrisy, for in one address of our Lord to them, they are never mentioned without the epithet "Hypocrites" being the introduction to some fresh list of their sins. *These* austere fasting men were the persons who gave money to Judas and induced him to betray the Lord Christ.

It is acknowledged that fasting was a common *Jewish* custom, but it is quite as certain that it was not a *Christian* observance in the first century of our era ; if it must be followed *because* it was usual amongst the Hebrews, the *manner* should, for the same reason, be

* Zach. viii. 19.

adopted, for all solemn stated fasts were held in sack-cloth and ashes ; and if fasting be enjoined as an ancient religious custom, why omit the perpetual washings before eating, and ministering in public worship ? They each stand on the same foundation, that of being the general usage of the Jews, but on none other—Christ our master observed neither. *

There are *no omissions* in the New Testament as to the positive *duties* of Christians, for there are either the actual precepts *written*, or there is the *practice* of the apostolical churches recorded for “our instruction in righteousness ; not even the *singing* of Psalms is forgotten ; for this there is the example of Christ with his apostles, † and many directions in the Epistles, thus “speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” ‡ The command to *pray* is perpetually repeated ; “In everything by prayer and supplication making your requests known unto God.” § *Almsgiving* is strongly enjoined. The oft renewed contributions of the churches to each other leave no doubt as to the necessity of benevolence and generosity. St. Paul’s advice to Timothy is most precise even upon apparently unimportant matters, as “drink no longer water ;” and also upon the ornaments worn by women. The apostle is still more definite and imperative upon the *marriage of bishops and deacons*, || which state it would seem

* Mark vii. 1 to 9. † Mark xiv. 26. ‡ Ephe. v. 19. § Phil. iv. 6.

|| This passage (1 Tim. iii. 2) is often said to mean that a bishop should only have one wife at a time, (which Christ’s disciples previously knew,) or that he was not to take a second in case of the first dying ; it may bear both significations, but still the distinct *command remains* for the marriage of the person in *that* office. The phrase runs—“A bishop then *must be*

was considered by him as an absolutely necessary qualification for such offices. * These, with many other duties, are binding upon clergy and laity, but where is fasting? it is excluded. In what epistle is there such a practice advised, recommended, or commanded? There is line upon line as to *watching and praying, singing and almsgiving, kindness and charity*, but *never, never* is there one direction *given or implied* by "Holy men of God," who were inspired to write the whole counsel of God, that Christians should fast.

Immediately after the ascension, when "the Bridegroom *was taken away*," the apostles and disciples "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication," † but did not fast on the two most important occasions which occurred at that time, namely, the election of an apostle, and the expected appearing of the promised Comforter. The only times when fasting is ever mentioned as having been used in the service of the Christian church, are where Paul and Barnabas were separated for the work of the ministry," ‡ and when elders were ordained. || It is therefore probable that on the departure of missionaries, and the ordination of the clergy, fasting was a part of the solemnity, and these passages of Scripture which are remarkable as being the only examples given upon the subject of

blameless." Is there any permission given to the bishop that he may deem it a matter of indifference whether he be blameless or not? The apostle allows no such choice, but asserts positively that *blamelessness and a wife* are important things, without which no one is competent to fill such a position in the church. The two requisites are joined together by inspired authority, who may separate them?

* Tim. iii. 2-12. † Acts i. 14. ‡ Acts xiii. 3. || Acts xiv. 23.

fasting in the new economy may be deemed conclusive as positive precedents in such cases, whilst the laity may still be allowed to "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free," and not be entangled in a yoke of bondage never put on their souls by "the *Author* and *Finisher* of their faith," and which would enchain them in superstitious observances, which experience invariably shows to be a "form of godliness destitute of the power thereof."

The apostles assembled at Jerusalem for the express purpose of settling the discipline and doctrine of the church on some important points, but they declined putting any yoke upon it, and "that no greater burden" should be laid than four specified restrictions, amongst which fasting was *not* named. *

Christians were not to be troubled with either *Jewish* or *Gentile* customs, and when the order was given "to abstain from meats offered to idols," it might easily have been added (if such were to have been a law and rule) "but also refrain from all meat two days in the week," yet they are told they shall "do well" when they have obeyed the injunctions given by the apostles, for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, † "for neither if we eat are we the better, neither if we *eat not* are we the worse." ‡ St. Peter writes "abstain from fleshly lusts," but gives no advice as to abstinence from food, and St. Paul, arguing upon things indifferent, commences by requesting the strong in the faith to have pity on the weak; § *those* are the weak who cannot comprehend that the bountiful gifts of God's providence are "to be received with thanksgiving" at all times, and that nothing is unclean in itself; but whilst he kindly

* Acts xv. 10. † Rom. xiv. 17. ‡ 1 Cor. viii. 8. § Rom. 15.

urges the strong to bear with the infirmities of others, he never meant the gentle dispositions of Christians was to yield so completely to "babes in Christ," or to feeble superstitious minds, as to enter upon a course of slavish submission in meats and drinks, times and seasons, to those who have much craft, and to others who have little judgment and less sense. Conciliation should be shown to "little children," but to refrain from necessary food was never taught by the Lord nor his inspired followers, and instead of the Gentile converts being applauded for keeping fasts and seasons, (as had always been their heathenish custom,) St. Paul says, "Foolish Galatians, *ye observe days and months and times and years*, I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain." * "Now turn ye to the beggarly elements whereunto ye desire to be in bondage?" Did this apostle admire or institute saints' days or lent? For he says also to the Colossians, "Let no man, therefore, judge you in meat or drink, or of the Sabbath days.† When the vision appeared to Peter, at Joppa, he was not fasting, for "he went upon the house-top to pray," and when there "he became hungry and would have eaten, and while they made ready he fell into a trance," and in it he saw, in the sheet let down from heaven, "all manner of four-footed beasts, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air," *but no fish*. "And there came a voice to him, rise Peter, kill and eat. But Peter said, not so Lord; for I have never eaten anything which is common or unclean. And the voice spake again the second time, *What God hath cleansed that call not*

* Gal. iv. 10, xi. 9.

† Col. ii. 16. The Jewish and Christian Sabbaths being on different days, a question might arise upon them.

thou common or unclean.”* All flesh, even the most noxious and disgusting, was cleansed, but *fish* was not mentioned; if there be any difference, *that* meat is less holy than *animal* food, for it has never been formerly cleansed as even the creeping things were. It may also be observed, that Peter was *desired* to eat of the flesh of any beast or bird that he chose, and this upon an occasion, when the Lord was sending him, by express revelation, for the first time, to the Gentiles, with whom, until then, he would not have eaten.

Cornelius, although a devout man, was not a Christian when Peter was sent to him; when the angel spake to him he said, “thy *prayers* and thine *alms* are come up for a memorial before God,” but the *fasting* which Cornelius mentioned is left unnoticed.

When Saul, of Tarsus, on his way to Damascus, saw the heavenly display he fell to the ground, and having been deprived of sight, by the glory which had been revealed to him, he was led by the hand into the city, where he was blind for three days, and “did neither eat nor drink.” When Ananias was spoken to by the Lord, the same inattention is paid to the abstinence of Saul as there had been in the case of Cornelius, for the holy man is sent to the afflicted and repentant persecutor by God for this reason, “*for* behold he prayeth.” Instead of a further fast being required, the narrative states, “he received meat and was strengthened.”†

St. Paul writes, when you sit at meat “ask no questions for conscience sake,” even to satisfy scruples as to whether it had been offered to idols, but he never intimates that God would be wrath with those who should eat meat on some particular days, when it would be

* Acts 10. † Acts 9.

forbidden by men, or that partaking of *fish* on Wednesdays and Fridays, or in a season to be called Lent, would be acceptable service to the Most High. He who follows the arbitrary commands of the Nicene or Romish churches, virtually denies the revelation of God, by proclaiming that unclean which he has cleansed. Christ repeatedly said, “that whatsoever entereth into a man defileth him not,”* he knew exactly what was right and what was wrong, and could not err in opinion, and by such expressions distinctly shows that the reception of food of any sort or kind, or on any day or hour, cannot be, and is not displeasing to the Almighty giver of every good gift.

There is an example given by Saint Luke completely satisfactory on this point, † as evincing the perfect propriety of people eating when they are hungry, for when the disciples ate the ears of corn which they plucked and rubbed on the Sabbath day, Christ justified their conduct to the captious Pharisees, *because* they were hungry, by referring, as a precedent, to what David and others did, who, when they *wanted food*, took such as was otherwise unlawful for them to taste.

All who know they are liable to transgress beyond proper bounds in eating, are as wise to abstain in their measure of food, as are they who, by even tasting of the wine in the cup, are led into excess; but those who use meat and drink merely as necessary preservatives of life and strength are permitted, on all requisite occasions, to eat without fear of infringing upon the revealed will of God, who “bestoweth all things liberally and upbraideth not.” It may also be desirable for those whose passions are so violent as to be neither under the control of reli-

* Matt. xv. 11. † Matt. 12.

gion nor reason, to subdue such by fasting, for hunger is the only mode by which some wild beasts can be tamed. But why should others who are differently constituted, and who bow at once to the dictates of piety and sense, be forced to make themselves wretched or ill, by an abstinence which is neither required nor commanded by God ?

St. Paul tells the Corinthians,* “The ministers of God should approve themselves in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, stripes, distresses, imprisonments, *tumults*, labours, fastings.”† Amongst the several trials to which they were exposed, fasting was to be endured with the same resignation as other unavoidable calamities, for when the apostle, in a later part of the epistle, ‡ recounts his sufferings in the cause of Christ, such as being “beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked,” and perils of various kinds, he mentions, amongst other involuntary hardships and sorrows, “*hunger*, and *thirst*, and *fastings*,” if these seasons of abstinence had been Christian duties, like prayer and thanksgiving, they would not have been in the catalogue of his disasters and difficulties, as hindering his work amongst the heathen. Prayer is not included in his sad narrative, but had *fasting* been an equally acceptable service to God, St. Paul would thankfully have used so efficacious an addition to his wonted and unceasing supplications, and recommended the practice to others ; but he no more desires men to fast than he commands them to go

* 2nd vi. 5.

† In 2nd Cor. xii. 20, “*tumults*” are classed amongst evil things, such as “envy and wrath,” therefore cannot possibly be meant as an object of spiritual attainment, any more than “debate and strife.”

‡ 2nd Cor. xi. 23 to 27.

into tumults as a means of grace, or to be shipwrecked for the good of their souls. In a previous epistle,* the same inspired apostle writes, “Even to this present hour we both hunger and thirst, are reviled, are persecuted, and the off-scouring of all things,” so that *fasting* is placed by him amidst the greatest evils and adversities of human nature, and considered by him as neither a merit nor a duty, but as a trial to be borne with submission and patience when unavoidable, but no more a Christian duty than *seeking* persecution and abuse.

Saint Paul was as great an example of forbearance towards and for others, as he was of all other Christian graces; when he says, “Am I not free?” “Have we not power to eat and drink?” He also writes, “If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh whilst the world standeth.”† The 8th chapter to the Corinthians is chiefly “touching things offered to idols;” as, in this country, there is no danger of sinning on that point, the apostle’s concession to “weak consciences” cannot be any example to Christians whilst in England, but to those whose avocations lead them into heathen lands, an important lesson may still be learnt from it; as for instance:—The Hindoos, having been taught from time immemorial that it was sinful to eat anything which ever had life, might even, as Christians, innocently retain an aversion to animal food, and a *prejudice* towards those who ate it. In these circumstances a missionary, from prudence and kindness to these “weak consciences,” might also eat no meat lest he offend his “little children” in Christ, but that could be no reason that every European, in India, should equally abstain from meat, and live on vegetables.

* 1 Cor. iv. 11. † 1 Cor. viii. 13.

In detailing the account of Saint Paul's voyage to Italy, * Saint Luke mentions, as *a date*, that when he was near Lasea, "the fast was already past," by which statement is to be understood that the apostle was sailing from Cæsarea the latter end of September, at which time the great day of atonement was celebrated according to the ceremonial law of Moses. This fast was never a Christian ordinance, nor could be observed as such by Saint Paul; he was "in a ship of Alexandria," which would be manned by Jews or Gentiles, but certainly not by Christians; the former would hold the day sacred, but as the apostle never allowed the converts from heathenism to practice the ceremonies or keep the Jewish festivals, it is not probable that he would fast on an occasion which had no longer any signification, for since Christ, in his own person, had fulfilled all the types and shadows, St. Paul, and every other Christian, was loosed from each ceremonial of the Mosaic economy. As neither Christ nor his apostles by precept or example commanded fasting, so during their lifetime and in the period immediately following their decease, the custom was not observed nor valued, and that was certainly the purest age of the church.

A very ancient work, "The Shepherd" of Hermas,† speaks of fasting in the most disparaging terms; "Nothing is gained by bodily abstinence; rather so fast that ye do no wrong and harbour no evil passion in your heart." In the middle of the second century fasting was little practised, and Tertullian (in accordance with the tenets of the heretic Montanus) loudly

* Acts 27.

† It is a disputed point whether Hermas lived in the second century, or as early as A. D. 85.

complains of the want of attention paid by the church to its observance.

In the third century, Origen, in the whole of his voluminous works, mentions fasting but once, yet at that time Wednesday and Friday were considered to be fast days, but purely *voluntary* and *binding upon none*.

Such was the usage till the council of Orleans in the sixth century, when it was decreed that those who would not submit to fast on days appointed by the church (not by the gospel,) should be deemed offenders. When fasting first began, Good Friday was the *only* day in the whole year which was kept as a fast, but after some time the fast was lengthened on that anniversary to forty hours.*

In the fifth century, this fast was extended to thirty-six days; quite contrary to even the ancient usage of the second and third centuries, and against the "consent, agreement, and universality of the church."

In the sixth or eighth centuries, (for it is uncertain which,) four additional days were added, but the church universal differed in practice.

The Asiatics observed a fast of six or seven weeks, whilst, at Rome, for some time, only three weeks were held, omitting Saturday and Sunday.

In the age of Leo, the Romans fasted but three days in the week. Bede, who lived in the eighth century, says that some fasted twenty days, others only seven, so that it was not till the ninth century at soonest, that precise times, lengths and regularity of fasting became universal and with consent and agreement. Such was the diversity which pervaded christendom, but whatever rule was adopted it could never be traced to the

* See note 4.

scriptures of the New Testament nor to apostolical times. As there was no divine law to justify these encroachments upon Christian liberty, and as they *all* proceeded from the private judgment of those who introduced and enforced their innovations, so the same authority (if again attained,) may decree, that Lent shall continue six months instead of six weeks.

Two totally distinct things are now joined together in the usage of the church, as if they had been consecutive; the fast of forty days in the wilderness is now commemorated in conjunction with the three days of Christ's passion, death and resurrection, just as if the temptation in the desert had been the introduction to the agony in the garden, whereas the circumstances of the two events were three years apart, as the former was at the *beginning* of our Lord's public career, and the latter was at the *end* of it. These occurrences were also at opposite seasons of the year; the Temptation being in the month Tisan, which is in our autumn, the passover kept always in the month Nisan, which is in our spring.

If a Lent of forty days be required, in every year, *because* Christ *once* in his life-time observed abstinence for that period, (yet during that time, by his own divine power, he did not suffer from want of food, as the gospel explicitly states that, at the expiration of the period, "he was *afterward* an hungered,) * or if all the great events in his history should be observed in like manner, then the forty days *after* his resurrection might be kept by the church as a fast with much more justice, for the interval between that occurrence (upon which the whole truth of Christianity depends†) and the Ascension, is of

* Matt. iv. 2. † 1 Cor. xv. 17—" For if Christ be not raised, your faith is in vain."

greater importance to mankind, and deserves to be much oftener brought before the mind than the temptation, for it was a season of peculiar trial to the disciples. Why, then, should the latter be more strictly observed than the former? There is the strongest connexion between the resurrection and the ascension, as the one could not have been without the other, and the eternal interests of the world are involved in both these circumstances, whilst the Temptation and the Fast are neither doctrines nor commandments on which to rest our faith, and yet these things, which *apparently* have nothing to do with the salvation of any soul, are to be considered and set apart as the most holy season of the year.

After the resurrection, the Lord remained forty days in seclusion, but although, "by many infallible proofs," he showed that he was risen from the dead, yet his disciples were left in much perplexity; he seemed to have gone from them, and the promised Comforter was not come. The whole of this time must have been spent by his followers in extreme anxiety for "some doubted," and when the Lord did visit them, they never ventured to question him upon any subject; they were as sheep without a shepherd, yet, during the whole term of their suspense, there is not a single intimation given that they fasted. When Jesus met two of the disciples, on the day on which he rose from the dead, he "sat at meat with them."* In the evening he appeared to the eleven at Jerusalem, "and said to them have ye any meat? and they gave him a broiled fish and a honey comb."

When the Lord met them on the sea-shore, again he asked, "Have ye any meat," and he took bread and fish likewise. † It is most remarkable, that the three dif-

* Luke xxiv. 30. † John xxi. 5.

ferent times that Christ showed himself privately to his disciples, he should, on each occasion, have taken a meal with them, and Peter particularly mentions that they "did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead."* This does not seem to recommend fasting even at the most solemn and important times.†

The apostles did not retire to barren wastes and sandy deserts to spend their days in slothful ease or pompous exhibitions of abstinence and mortification; they went from city to city, from country to country, "proclaiming the everlasting gospel to barbarian, Scythian, bond or free," but had they, to escape persecution, or on pretence of being rapt in divine meditation and sanctimoniuous ecstasy, forgotten the vocation wherewith they were called, and left the arduous work of "preaching Christ crucified," they might have become fine specimens of monks, but wretched examples of faith, hope, and charity. Our Lord gave definite instructions to his disciples for their conduct in times of distress, difficulty, and oppression, for he said, "When they persecute you in one *city* flee to *another*,"‡ and when there was a great persecution after the martyrdom of Stephen, the church which was at Jerusalem were "scattered abroad." They did not retreat into the solitudes of the mountains to set up each a shrine to his individual selfishness, nor to erect golden calves to their own honour and glory, but "they travelled as far as Phenice preaching the word."§ If solitude, fasting, and maceration of the body had been

* Acts x. 41.

† As many of the apostles were fishermen, their chief food would be fish, and Christ followed the precept he had given; "take such things as they have."

‡ Matt. x. 23. § Acts xi. 19.

the most acceptable service which the saints could have rendered to God in seasons of affliction and calamity, Christ would certainly have stated such important truths, and the first Christians would have obeyed his precepts. But, instead of wasting their lives in slothful privacy, they were always going about doing good unto others ; the acts of the apostles bear witness to their unwearied diligence and exertions, in pouring the light of Christianity upon heathen lands, and also to the indefatigable zeal of both men and women in spreading the gospel.

If all these persons had withdrawn from their active duties and erected and retired into monasteries and nunneries, for the purpose of perpetual fasting and prayer, under the mistaken idea that they were performing the highest duty to God by leaving the world "to perish for lack of knowledge," Christ would have died in vain, for his gospel would at once have been hid, as in the dark ages, when men loving only themselves, forgot all love to their neighbour, and started and pursued a course of folly and impiety, which gained the admiration and imitation of millions, but crushed the first-fruits of apostolical labour, and that also of their immediate successors.

This is strongly exemplified by the present state of Palestine, the northern coast of Africa, and the land of Egypt, which have for centuries been completely Mahometan, although, in the Nicene ages, those countries were filled with monks, hermits, and monastic institutions of every kind.

The great body of Christian converts were from the Gentile world, and the corrupt practices in which they had been educated, always worked as leaven amongst them. The purely spiritual faith and worship of the gospel had much to contend with in the minds of those

whose religion had consisted in the pageantry and fables of heathenism.

Saint Paul never flattered the Gentiles into Christianity, but freely pointed out to them their errors and dangers. Thus, he says, “Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, *after the commandments and doctrines of men?* Which things, indeed, have a *show* of wisdom in will worship, and *humility, and neglecting of the body*; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.”*

Amongst both *Jews and Gentiles* sanctimonious professors had been common from the earliest ages, and the more abstracted and secluded such were in their lives and manners, the more respect and awe they elicited. Long ere Delphi was known, and before Greece had attained any degree of civilization, the oracle at Dodona was celebrated; the ministers at that shrine were the Salli, a priesthood of *austerest* life. This mode of attracting notice and popularity had answered too important an end to be discontinued, and it can excite no surprise to find how soon the pharisaical conceit of the Jews, and the crafty policy and fanaticism of the pagans, were engrafted on the true olive, for as the fruit had been so abundant under the old management, there was reason to expect that, if equal care were bestowed again upon its culture, the produce might be as beneficial under the new system, and the result showed that the small seed eventually grew up into a tree, whose branches covered the earth.

* Coloss. ii. 18, &c.

Despotic monarchs keep their people in subjection by means of their troops, and a church *militant* also understands the value of bands of men, who, being united by various ties, whether of interest or imagination, to their Supreme Head, constitute and support his power; so that an unmarried clergy is an invaluable addition to such a government, and form as it were, both a police and standing army.

When Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians, (1 vii. 2) "*Let every man have his own wife, and every woman her own husband,*" can it be supposed he meant the world to understand all persons were to remain in a state of celibacy; or when the apostle foretells that a community would arise which "shall depart from the faith," and states, amongst other marks by which it might be known that within its pale would be "forbidding to marry,"* could it ever be supposed that such an error, which also is unceremoniously termed "*doctrine of devils,*" was ever to be established in the Christian church? Saint Paul wrote by "inspiration from God," "a bishop must be the husband of one wife," the deacons are under the same law, and each are to "rule their children and *own* houses well."† As these commands have never been abrogated by the Spirit who first gave them "for instruction in righteousness," they are as binding upon the church now as at the time they were promulgated, and are for perpetual and general observance. When the Hebrews are reminded "not to forsake the assembling of themselves together," it did not seem that Saint Paul was recommending to a whole people the supreme excellence of solitude and seclusion. The three thousand persons who were baptized on the day of Pentecost did

* 1 Tim. iv. 1-3. † 1 Tim. iii. 2 to 18.

not fly into the deserts, but continued "in fellowship" together.

Long before the Christian era, Asceticism had been known in Judea, for the Essenes (who are mentioned in Jewish history soon after the second captivity,) were an ancient rigid establishment, yet were never held up as objects of admiration or imitation by Christ. The Orientals had always amongst them many individuals who exhibited the perfection of their creeds by becoming useless members of society, but this was usually done without congregating in numbers, or instituting by means of the benevolent, fearful, or credulous, perpetual foundations for the permanent residence of an order. Before the close of the fourth century it was universally taught that "*the married held low positions in heaven,*" and as the laity were made to believe that celibacy was the chief grace, and highest virtue, to which a Christian could attain, he, therefore, who wished to be spiritual-minded, eschewed marriage as a crime, or a fearful state.

One permitted error is the source of a thousand more. A *fasting* devotee cannot work, and to such *celibacy* is an unavoidable state, for *few* idle people can afford to maintain others; they must, therefore, live alone, or associate with those who, each throwing his small means into a common stock, may contrive to live until such times as their wonderful and well-exhibited sanctity have drawn from the purses of credulous admirers, the funds which ought to have been gained by their own exertions of head or hands.

Monasticism not only arose from a supposition that celibacy was a state of the highest holiness, but also from an entire misapprehension of the character of God. Saint John says that "God is love," (1 iv. 16,) but a

heathen reading the lives of most of the Nicene saints, could not but conclude that the God of the Christians was a Moloch, whose worship consisted in the misery of his votaries, and who could only be propitiated by offerings of pain, which amounted to anguish, and of self-denial, which produced disease and madness.

Christ and his apostles taught very opposite doctrines to those instilled into the minds of men in the third and fourth centuries. Christianity is not a religion of torture and wretchedness, but of "joy and peace in believing." The Lord certainly did foretell *tribulation* as the portion of his followers, but not because affliction was part and parcel of the "peace" which he left, (John xiv. 27,) but that the pure and holy precepts of the gospel would be so unwelcome to the world, that those who embraced it would be persecuted by its opponents, either for casting off heathenism, whether under the guise of pagan or pretended Christian doctrines, or for preferring a purely spiritual to a sensual form of worship.

Fasting and celibacy, with their attendant errors, gave rise to monastic institutions, established by men whose useless morbid devotion or selfish idleness cared not for wealth, but who left an excuse to others for enriching themselves, and who, by professing to have all power in heaven and earth, contrived (whilst under the sworn vow of poverty) to obtain, in England alone, larger revenues and possessions than belonged to the king and government.*

Although there had long been solitaries who gained name and fame by abstracted lives of sanctity, it remained for later times to consolidate these individuals into systematic bodies. Anthony is accounted the father

* See note 6.

and founder of monasticism ; he was born about the middle of the third century.* In early life this illiterate fanatic became a hermit, and lived in an old sepulchre ; from thence he migrated into the mountains, where he remained until the beginning of the fourth century, when he descended from these solitudes and founded a monastery, having been followed by numbers as superstitious and indolent as himself, who also forsook, not only the cares and duties, but the pleasures, comforts, and decencies of life, in order (as they professed) to arrive at close and rapturous communion with God, whose command “ *six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work, and rest on the seventh day,*” they chose entirely to forget. These monks seemed to imagine that to render their lives miserable, and exhaust their strength by fasting, was the chief end of their existence, and that to make no use of their faculties, and take leave of their senses, were the highest Christian attainments.

After a time, these devotees became so numerous as to be classed into regular orders in monastic establishments ; but ere that took place generally, they were divided into Cœnobites and Eremites ; the former were wise enough to live in company, whilst the latter were immured in profound retirement. The Anchorites went even beyond them in austerity ; the Sarabites followed a more amusing branch of the profession, roving about like the mendicant friars of later days, or the Indian fakirs of these, and also, like them, working miracles, and carrying on a lucrative traffic in relics, the supply of which was always equal to the demand.†

To such extreme length did these follies extend, that thousands of persons forsook their homes and country,

* See note 7. † See note 8.

and left the helpless, the industrious, and the zealous Christian, to bear the whole brunt of their persecutors, whilst the cowardly men fled to safety and solitude. Various were their tastes and caprices ; some chose to be walled up in dens, like wild beasts, with merely an aperture, through which they might vouchsafe to look, at their convenience, upon the wandering pilgrims who wanted the advice of these men, or presented offerings of such incense as was acceptable at the holy shrines. Others lived in absolute and unbroken seclusion, and although less ornamental, were just as useful to mankind as their silent neighbours, the huge statues in the city of Thebes. It is affirmed that these solitary devotees had acquired “such supernatural familiarity” with wild beasts, that lions assisted them *in digging graves*, and wolves brought food when the recluses condescended to eat ! But many who roamed more at large shared in the same reputation, and gained equal celebrity by refusing all food suitable for their fellow creatures, and, joining the brute creation, partook, with them, of the grass, or undressed herbage, which the earth spontaneously produced. To such a measure of sanctity did that class attain, by living upon this diet, that they obtained the distinction of being called **GRAZING SAINTS**. Mr. Newman observes in regard to all those persons, “ How touching is the communion with nature, which has always characterized the *saints* ! ”

In the first age of conventional establishments (the 4th century), there might be many reasons why a timid or idle Christian might wish to withdraw himself from the persecutions of the heathen, or escape from the active duties to which the religion of Christ called him, and at that time, probably, the ambition of influencing more

than the immediate neighbourhood, or district, around the monastery, might be the highest point to which any might aspire, but in process of time bishops were selected from the most obscure cells, and then came the vision of a triple crown to the inmates of abodes where the world, with its pomps and vanities, was *said* to be renounced, and where *poverty* was a professed principle.* “The kingdoms of this world and all the glory of them” have been too often exhibited and offered, by Satan, as a goodly prize, which has tempted millions to the race, in which such was the reward; and many a shaven monk has seized, and held them with a grasp, firm as that of a pagan Cæsar,† and though the multitude of cowled heads have been disappointed, yet each could hope for the papal tiara.

It would, indeed, be a vain thing to suppose that all who embraced monastic lives, were induced to follow it from love to God. To the man bowed down by remorse for crime, who was taught that fasting and penance would suffice as an atonement for sin; to him who fled from the disappointments of ambition, and who hoped to find, in solitude and silence, relief for his troubled heart, or to the individual whose morbid sensibilities were never awakened to the benevolent exertions of duty, and who found food for his selfish devotion in the inane round of oft-repeated litanies to the virgin and saints, monasteries might be acceptable asylums, for although monks were bound by certain vows, they were not prisoners within the walls of their cloisters, but might rove through the world, on any occasion, where interest led them.

But nunneries are places of a much more objectionable

* Celestine the Fifth. † Boniface 8th.

and mournful kind. The inmates of these sad abodes are always incarcerated as if they were convicted felons, nor are ever permitted, when once the vows are taken, to enjoy God's lovely creation of hill and valley, wood and stream, or partake in the gentle charities which belong to friends and kindred, house and home. The females of a Turkish harem are not so closely concealed from public view as are the persons profanely called "the spouses of Christ;" that such holy women are not deemed sufficiently trustworthy to take care of themselves, and are therefore forced into perpetual seclusion, is a circumstance which does not lead to the idea they would *willingly* remain in such bondage, nor can it be deemed flattering to the extreme sanctity of those whose sacred character is said to be so transcendantly godly as to be dead to the world.*

There is no point in stronger contrast than the conduct of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that of *all monks* in their treatment of women. The latter deem the mere sight of them pollution, and the biographers of Loyala make it their boast, that for thirty years he never looked at one. Our Divine Master shunned *none*; whether it were the Syrophenician eloquently pleading for the health of her child, the widow casting her mite into the treasury, or the fearful stranger touching the hem of his garment, he heard, commended, and healed each. With the perfect graciousness which characterised his every action—he compassionated the sorrows of the sisters of Bethany, and announced to one of them the glorious doctrine that he is "the resurrection and the life," and calling for the other, "when he saw her weeping," he also wept, and raised their brother from the dead. †

* See note 9. † John 11.

The Mary who poured the precious ointment on his head, was not spurned, but promised everlasting remembrance for her pious deed; the Magdalen who was “last at the cross and first at the tomb,” was honoured by becoming the first witness of the resurrection, and *she* had worshipped her risen Lord long ere the apostles were permitted even to believe, much less to see *Him* whom “very early in the morning,” *she* had acknowledged as her God.

There is not one instance given in the whole New Testament in which *women* are not regarded with kindness, or where they are ever rebuked for speaking to, or being with Christ, or ever made to feel they were too low in the scale of creation to be deemed fit associates for men of the most sacred profession or calling. If women were allowed to “*minister*” to the Lord Jesus, surely a hierarchy of celibates, or a wilderness of monks could claim no superior right to treat them with scorn or contumely.

When all the apostles and “brethren” of Jesus continued, with one accord, in prayer and supplication together in Jerusalem, the *women* were with them, and were considered no unimportant part of that singularly select and perfectly apostolical and primitive church.*

The epistle of Saint John “to the elect lady and her children” shows that he deemed her worthy of his notice and esteem, although she was a *married* woman, and the greetings he conveys from “the children of her elect sister,” also declares she was in the same condition of life.†

Nothing can exceed the graceful and courteous intro-

* Acts i. 13, 14. † 2 John.

duction of Saint Paul's messenger to the Church at Rome, than to call her "Phœbe, our sister."*

A systematic religious contempt of women is a highly unscriptural and unchristian dogma, wholly unsupported by any example or precept in holy writ; and whilst such an assumption of superiority, and such a dissolution of the natural ties of society have hardened the hearts, they have not preserved the morals of men.

Those whose church principles rest chiefly on tradition may not refuse its testimony when it happens to be entirely against them in argument, for the authority they love so well declares, that, with the single exception of Saint John, *all* the apostles were married. It is in vain to deny that Peter had a wife, or that those who are specifically designated as "the brethren of the Lord" were married, and tradition also adds that Saint Peter's wife was with him, at Rome, until his death. As according to monastic doctrine, virginity is the grace to which is awarded the highest and loftiest positions in heaven, it becomes, in consequence, a question, where then are Peter and most of the apostles? As by this rule *they* are inferior in degree to the meanest celibate!

The party who have lately placed themselves in the chairs of authority, and who hold up "antiquity" as the pure model which English protestants should follow, are pleased to say the men of the first six centuries were "wiser and better than we." "By their fruits ye shall know them."

To show the height to which the *wisdom* and *goodness* of the Nicene church arose (immediately before it verged and was fused into the papal), and to prove what sort of excellence and piety the clergy and laity of those

* Rom. xvi. 1.

succeeding ages considered Christian perfection, a well known and (then) universally admired specimen shall be adduced.

In the fifth century arose the order of the Stylites, the Sancti Columnares or Pillar Saints, who were also denominated “Holy Birds” and “Aerial Martyrs.” The most celebrated of this exalted sect was Simeon Sisanites, a Syrian shepherd, who, from the pious desire of spending his life nearer heaven than ordinary men, (who stand merely upon the terra firma created for them by their Almighty maker,) caused pillars of different altitudes to be erected for his use, till the last upon which he perched was sixty feet high. The column was but three feet in diameter, therefore he could only stand or crouch upon it; he was always bowing in prayer. A spectator counted the bows which, in one day, amounted to one thousand two hundred and forty-four; he began to move his head at four in the morning, and ceased at eight in the evening; he had an iron collar round his neck, and wore only the skins of beasts. His biographers state that, during the six weeks of Lent, he *took no food*, yet he lived upon the pillar 37 years.*

There was another Simon scarcely less famous than the former, and who even rivalled his predecessor, having lived above the world 68 years. He professed to cast out devils (but his own evil genius stayed with him) healed the sick, and did all and everything which could be expected from such a high-minded man.

This extraordinary and ridiculous absurdity lasted for upwards of *seven* centuries in the Christian church, and these Simons are still *her canonized* saints. Were the people who either practised or sanctioned such outrages upon common sense “*wiser and better than we?*”

* See note 10.

When the Mahometans overthrew the kingdoms and paganism of the east, Palestine was invaded by them ; at that time there were between six and seven thousand monks on and about Mount Sinai.* If that large number of men, who had succeeded each other in those deserts for centuries, instead of wasting their time, strength, and talents on a monotonous round of fasts and formal prayers, had been spending their energies in diffusing the doctrines of Christianity in Arabia and the adjacent countries, the followers of the false prophet would not easily have made a conquest of the once mighty empire, and the cross might never have been supplanted by the crescent in the city of Constantine.

It is impossible to say what the present state of the world would have been, if all the men who devoted themselves to monastic lives had been as anxious to spread the religion of Christ amongst their idolatrous fellow-creatures, as they were to repeat, with scrupulous exactness, a certain number of prayers day by day. *Occasionally* a monk left his convent and went to heathen lands and preached the gospel, and met with the success his mission deserved, but *generally* they remained stationary in their particular locations.

If a community of a thousand monks can speedily transform a sterile region into beauty and verdure, any body of men, with leisure and similar *public* means, can do the same, but whilst much praise is lavished upon the inmates of monasteries for having rendered their splendid abodes each the centre of a lovely scene of wood and water, it is forgotten that the Lord never intended his ministers† to assemble together as agricul-

* See note 11.

† All monks were considered a part of the hierarchy, although great numbers were never ordained.

tural societies, nor to be congregated, in large numbers, with all the pomp and circumstance of secular power, nor is it remembered that if the same care and labour had been bestowed upon the *moral* culture of the human family as were lavished upon the domains of abbeys, "the day-spring from on high" would have shone upon the regions of darkness and desolation, and the solitary places now overgrown by the thorns of superstition and paganism, might have "rejoiced and blossomed as a rose."

But whilst the monastic orders (though fully awake to their own increasing wealth and power) slept as to the mental condition of mankind, the enemy sowed tares which produced a thousand fold. The ignorance of Europe, and the rise and progress of Mahometanism, may fairly be said to lie as a heavy sin upon the church of the Nicene and middle ages, which, instead of educating and urging to usefulness the energies of the public mind, fostered and encouraged monkery, with all its attendant evils, until that heavy mass of error caused "a darkness which might be felt" throughout all chris-tendom, and left even science and literature to the Saracens, who, by their superior activity and knowledge, almost extinguished the first fruits of Christianity in the east, and seized upon some of the finest portions of the west.* The question is not whether monasteries were more moral or religious than the courts and camps of those ages, but whether they were institutions in accordance with either the *letter or the spirit* of Christianity. In apostolic times, the gospel was never spread by such means. There were severe persecutions during the lives of John, Peter, and Paul, yet none of those apostles, either by inference or command, desired their converts

* See note 12.

to forsake their avocations, families, or society,* for the mortifications and seclusion of deserts or monasteries, nor is it ever, in the slightest way, intimated that it would be acceptable service to God if hundreds of persons were to congregate under solemn vows in any given place, for the purpose of fasting themselves into wretchedness or insanity, or for the undisturbed convenience of repeating a continual string of litanies. Saint John did not found a monastery on Patmos, nor did Saint Paul ever exhibit himself in an imaginary halo of equivocal virtues, such as silence and abstraction from everything useful.

When Anthony first established his monastery, there was no persecution, nor were they ever instituted for the protection of the weak, but for the sole purpose of religious observances. There is much sentimentality afloat respecting the value and need of convents in the middle ages, as places of safety for defenceless orphans and maidens, who otherwise would have become the prey of the rapacious and lawless. But how arose this necessity, and why were there dark ages? The profound and elegant literature of the Greeks was complete before the Christian era; the learning of pagan Rome had attained its height ere the reign of Constantine; the canon of scripture was closed in *our* first century, and no new revelation was vouchsafed to Europe at the Reformation, so that all the intellectual treasures of the heathen Gentiles, and all the doctrines and precepts of Christianity had been, for a thousand years, just what they were in the fifteenth century. For twelve hundred years the Nicene and Romish churches had been paramount with tremendous powers, which they never were delicate

* John xvii. 15; 1 Cor. v. 9 to 13; 1 Cor. x. 27; 1 Tim. v. 8.

or scrupulous in using ; there were no national schisms to divide or weaken their influence, yet such was the state of society in Europe, under the sole teaching and instruction of these churches aided by millions of monks, that the chivalry of christendom (called by romancers “ the mirrors of courtesy ”) were so ferocious and licentious that even nunneries were not always safe asylums for women of royal or noble birth.* But whilst there was a cell, a convent, a monastery, in every hamlet, town, or district, the grossest ignorance and superstition *universally* prevailed ; nor were those shackles burst until *the gospel*, and *not the church*, was preached.

If *heresy out of the church* has slain its thousands, *monasticism in the church* has slain its ten thousands. Monks changed itself according to circumstances ; at first its whole merit consisted in celibacy, abstraction of mind and retirement from the haunts of men ; afterwards (but without diminishing, altering, or disparaging those things) succeeded a more public exhibition of sanctity upon columns, on the principle that such lights should not be hid, until, at length, these unscriptural delusions wrought a general madness. In the eleventh century the climax of sinful folly was attained, and the spirit of evil, which had long brooded like an incubus over christendom, awoke to life and fury.

Then Europe was aroused to phrensy ; Peter the Hermit, under the patronage of Urban the Second, preached a crusade against the Saracens, and as a plenary indulgence for all sin was granted by *that “ Lord God, the Pope,”* hundreds of thousands of persons availed themselves of the opportunity afforded of obtaining pardon and heaven on the pleasant terms of *plan-*

* See note 13.

dering and slaying the Saracens. Allured by the prospect of eternal happiness in the world to come, and of great gain and glory in this, the whole scum of society rose to the surface, and was headed by kings and nobles, *some* of whom believing they did God service embraced the enterprise with religious fervour.* Peter went from city to city, not like John the Baptist preaching repentance, but haranguing upon the duty of rescuing the holy places from the infidels. This ignorant enthusiast who raised bands of warriors for purposes of carnage and desolation, assumed the cross as the badge by which all were to be distinguished in this warfare, yet knew nothing of that gospel which is “peace on earth, good-will towards men.”†

That varying and easily misled cry, the vox populi, was said to be the vox Dei, and under this mistaken influence above eighty thousand men ranged themselves under the single banner of Peter, who walked at their head with a rope tied round his waist. His lieutenant was Walter the Penniless, and in the van of this lawless army were carried a sacred *goose* and *goat*, which were said to be filled with the Holy Ghost!

The conduct of Peter’s *absolved* rabble would have disgraced savages, and most of them were lost by different disasters on their route, but during their march to the East they performed, on every occasion, the pious duty of *killing* and *pillaging* the Jews, in all places where they were found, and many thousands of that people were slaughtered by the holy pilgrims.

Other crusaders at length reached Jerusalem, which was attacked and taken, when (by way of showing their exemplary piety) the whole garrison, and all the men,

* See note 14. † See note 15.

women, and *children*, were put to the sword, and after this virtuous and satisfactory massacre of the helpless and innocent, the godly Christian host walked in solemn procession to the holy sepulchre, and there wept floods of tears !

The apostle Peter writes, (1 Ep. ii. 11, 12,) “ I beseech you, as pilgrims and strangers, abstain from fleshly lusts.” “ Having your conversation honest amongst the Gentiles, that they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God.” Peter the Hermit, who represented the *spirit* of the catholic church in *that age*, taught very different doctrines, and how much credit the crusaders gained for their religion by their inhuman atrocities, need not be discussed in these pages.

When the seven great crusades to the east, and the lesser ones against the Albigenses had ceased, for want of success in the former, and victims in the latter, the mind of Europe again resumed its wonted unhealthy calm of moral stagnation, but the animalculæ of such times must be passed by. Benedictines, Franciscans, Dominicians, and mendicant orders, “ black, white, and grey,” swarmed in every country, and “ what the locust left, the Palmer-worm devoured.” * If a really great man did arise (by way of showing there is no rule without an exception), he was speedily silenced, and with-

* The mendicant orders were formed upon the model of the priests of Isis and Serapis ; each were bound by vows of abstinence, and lived by beggary. Their costume is precisely alike. In the chamber of the Young Apollo, in the Vatican, is a bas-relief, representing a priest of Isis, clad in the exact dress of a Franciscan, with the tonsure shaven in like manner. See Dr. Middleton’s letter, from Rome, for innumerable proofs of similarity between the worship and discipline of heathens and papal Rome.

drawn by *some means* from public notice. Friar Bacon is one of the few lights which, in monastic institutions, served to render the darkness more visible ; the treatment he received is too well known to be detailed here. If, in the space of a thousand years, there occasionally appeared a monk or abbot, who was superior to the age in which he lived, it no more proves his piety and attainments were the result of conventional discipline, than that the genius and penetration of Socrates and Plato arose from their professing paganism.

Good service to the papal church is generally something inimical and detrimental to Christianity ; fasts and penance soon took the place of reformation and repentance, whilst litanies to the virgin, and images of the madonna and all saints, usurped the worship and spiritual idea of the true God. For many ages both sacred and profane learning were sunk to the lowest ebb, and a deepening tide of ignorance set in, which threatened universal and lasting destruction to improvement. The small portion of learning which remained unextinguished in christendom by the prevailing miasma which arose from such a mass of error, was confined to *some* of the higher ranks of the clergy ; but even kings and prelates were frequently devoid of the lowest elements of erudition, and great numbers of the priesthood, and the entire bulk of the people, were unacquainted with the first rudiments of education.*

The *fault* of this debased condition rests solely with the clergy, who alone held "the key of knowledge," but who had their own reasons for retaining it, although their especial vocation was the instruction of the laity.

When it was invariably taught that the highest at-

* See note 16.

tainments in religion could only be made in the austerities of a conventional life of celibacy, the great duty of man was necessarily thought to be a never-ending round of oft-repeated fasts and formalities ; and as *ignorance* was certainly the parent of *such* devotion, it was needful to continue it, for the longer the chain of servitude could be entwined around the captive nations, the more obsequious and obedient were the slaves of Rome, and the more was her *wealth, power, and influence* increased ; and thus did dreary ages roll on, burdened and oppressed by the galling and heavy fetters of the papal hierarchy.

But at last, when all seemed sunk in everlasting desolation, bondage, and night, “the Sun of Righteousness arose” over some favoured countries, and those “who sat in darkness saw a great light ;” the bright beams of truth shone forth in their own effulgence, and the diffusion of the unvailed glory, kindled into life and beauty, into rapture and animation, the chilled and dying creation which had been frozen into the torpor of death.

Then the reformation, with its attendant benefits of *liberty* to body and soul, blessed the world ; but all were not privileged to receive it ; some preferred their condition of slavery, and remain in the thraldom they have chosen, yet they fancy they can see, for “in the empire of the blind the one-eyed are kings.”

But, however mischievous monkery may have been to the best interests of mankind, it never was a part of the system to teach that vice was virtue, or sin holiness in particular circumstances ; *this* was left for the last-born order of Anthony’s followers.

The whole object of the community of Jesuits (whose

very name has justly become a synonyme for deceit, falsehood, fraud, and craft,) is in the first place their *own* advancement, and then that of the church of Rome, but not of Christianity, for the one is generally a very distinct thing from the other, as a man may have a large measure of belief in the principles of Loyala, with none at all in the gospel ; he may be a devout worshipper of the Virgin, and yet have never heard of justification by faith, or that the greatest of spiritual gifts is charity.*

The word of God is of small value to the Jesuits who abrogate in their own practice much of the moral law ; the gospel of Christ is a dead letter to those who have *no* "good-will towards men," *no* "peace on earth" for any protestant church. What the love of God can be in the heart of him who has no love for his neighbour, is stated in Saint John's epistles. The sum and substance of the creed of the Jesuits is the aggrandizement of their order, and to secure this they affirm, the end justifies the means. Saint Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote whomsoever says "let us do evil that good may come, his damnation is just."† The followers of Loyala teach that any falsehood which benefits *the church* is praiseworthy, whilst Saint John says, "All liars shall have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone ;"‡ and Saint Paul further states "there is no fear of God before the eyes" of such "as with their tongues have used deceit."§

The sixth commandment is null and void amongst the Jesuits, and the *murder* of those who profess the protestant faith, or protect the reformed churches, is a

* Rom. v. 1 and 1 Cor. xiii. 13. † Rom. iii. 8. ‡ Rev. xxi. 8.

§ Rom. iii. 18, 13.

deed rewarded and applauded by human beings calling themselves "the society of Jesus." The circumstances attending the assassination of Henry the Fourth of France, give sufficient proof that these flagrant iniquities are both *planned* and *executed* at their instigation. By the rules of the order, treachery is not deemed immoral; dissimulation and deceit are accounted virtues, and the deepest perfidy and guilt is *absolved* and recompensed if it be for the advancement of *their* system. (See *Pascal's Provincial Letters.*)

Such is the mystery of iniquity systematically adopted and acted upon by the latest-formed, but most efficient of the monastic orders, whose members are less immoral and profligate in their outward deportment, and generally better educated than those of any other rule, yet are more to be dreaded and avoided than all the rest, as combining with the same unscriptural doctrines of celibacy, and unlimited obedience to the Pope, the power of moving about the world *unknown* and *unsuspected*, and entering into all the *business, amusements, and politics* of all countries and towns, as if they were merely secular men, with no private object in view. The whole policy of the Jesuits is to usurp the control of church and state in every nation, and the actions of each individual have this sole end, as the goal upon which his eye is steadily and invariably fixed; from the time of Elizabeth, until they were driven out of all kingdoms in disgrace, they were aiming at the lives of sovereigns, and endeavouring to crush the liberties of the people.

It was not in protestant countries alone that the mischief of their machinations was felt, for in the completest popish governments they were constantly

undermining the established authority, and scheming to enforce their own, until it was seen that the government of no state could be safely carried on with such a body of malcontents in its bosom, and they were not only expelled for their crimes from every community, but their order was dissolved.

Yet strange to say the Jesuits are again re-organized and allowed to take root in the soils which they formerly poisoned, notwithstanding the obloquy which history has poured but too justly upon the system for its continual sins against all Christian society. The evils which they invariably bring upon every people amongst whom they are permitted to settle, have yet to be felt anew, but are *sure* to arise, for they never change their ungodly creed, their secular object, or their love of power.

A tiger will crouch and creep ere he seizes his prey ; the stealthy step and half-closed eye are only a part of the mode by which he conceals his designs ; the unsuspecting gentle approach makes him not the less ravenous when the victim falls within his grasp, and when apparently satiated to fulness with carnage and destruction, he will slink into the darkened shade, there to wait for the next lamb which may cross his path. "He that hath ears to hear let him hear."*

From age to age monastic establishments of every kind have been weighed in "the balance of the sanctuary" and have been found wanting, and as such institutions are at variance with the laws of God, they never can be beneficial to mankind. Wherever the paramount priesthood is bound to a state of forced celibacy, the moral state of the population is at the lowest ebb of virtue, and in whatever country the church has been able to fix

* See note 17.

the chain of fasting, and where the most regular and austere fasts are observed, there are the people the most utterly devoid of spiritual religion and mental improvement.

The wise will always look back upon the past when they wish to form a correct judgment upon the efficacy of principles which have been long reduced to practice, for history is the experience of mankind.

If an established custom be conducive to the general good of society, then it is advisable to proceed with it, but if, after the fullest and fairest trial, the plan is found to be destitute of any profitable results in every nation where it has been adopted, it becomes not only useless but injurious to continue a thing which has constantly tended to foster evil.

For more than a thousand years the experiment of fasting has been made against all apostolical teaching and example; if *that* church, which insists upon the performance of it, were the most holy, moral, enlightened community in the world, it would be granted that this compulsory service might be one amongst many circumstances which rendered the papal religion thus pure, virtuous, and intellectual, but when it can be shown to an undeniable demonstration that, in those countries (whether known as Christian, Mahometan, or Heathen) where there are the most rigid fasts, the fasters are far more ungodly, selfish, and ignorant, than are those bodies of men who have no such observances, it may be worth while to pause ere such inventions as celibacy, fasting, and monastic institutions, are recommended for adoption in the reformed churches, which having followed the example, words, and doctrines of the Saviour, and his inspired apostles and evangelists, have allowed

all works of supererogation to fall into dissuetude, and, by strengthening their faculties of body and mind by the lawful use of all God's gifts, have attained pre-eminence above all the rest of mankind in every department.

Whatever tends to encourage self-righteousness, or the vain hope of meriting the favour of God, is a serious evil, and wherever the authority of scripture is unknown or set aside for the devices of men, *there* are always the greatest aberrations of sense and reason accompanied by flagitious and immoral conduct.

To prove that such is not an imaginary theory, but an *established and universal fact*, a very brief notice shall be given of the state of those people who hold long, regular, and compulsory fasts.

Mahometans keep the fast of the Ramadan strictly ; during the whole of that *month* *no* food is taken from day-break until after sun-set ; other fasts are as religiously kept at different times of the year ; yet no one ever heard of meek, godly Mussulmen, although they are very devout at certain appointed hours, and most scrupulous as to the forms of their ritual, but all their fasting, being reduced to a clock-work observance, is without any humiliation of soul, and therefore the best of them are but what might be expected from the tenets of the Koran ; proud, sensual, and ferocious, their contempt of Christianity is only equalled by their fancied superiority of themselves and their false prophet. If the fast of the Ramadan, which is one of much self-denial, neither allays their pride, their passions, nor their tempers, of what use is it to them ?*

* "Who will be my vizier ?" said Mahomet. "I will be thy vizier, Oh, prophet !" replied Ali. "I will kill thy enemies ; I will tear out their eyes ; I will rip them open ; I will dash out their brains !" Ali was at once appointed to the office.

Nations professing popery keep as fasts Wednesdays and Fridays, besides other appointed days, and a six weeks' Lent, yet Romanist countries are not particularly famous for the purity of their morals. Their fasts are not followed by holiness of life, nor particular regard to virtuous conduct, but, on the contrary, they lead the multitude to believe that abstaining from some kinds of food, at stated periods, is a meritorious action in the sight of God; they "do err, not knowing the scriptures," for no sooner are the times of fasting over than all the usual revelries are re-commenced with even greater avidity than before the solemn season (which holy weeks had been ushered in by the license of the carnival in many cities) for the heart being left unchanged by the formal and constrained duty, the life remains unaltered.*

The Greek church holds a rigorous fast during Lent, but its observance is attended with no more spiritual improvement or benefit than the same compulsory and stated privations produce elsewhere. In Russia, "the Easter festival itself begins in the middle of the night of the Saturday in Passion Week, and its joys are loud and incessant through the eight following days. This centre of festivity is preceded by a seven weeks' fast, as a preparation for the feast, and before the seven weeks' fast comes, an eight days' feast as a preparation for the fast. All these may be divided into three consecutive celebrations. First, eight days' drinking and carousing, called, by the Russians, butter week. Secondly, the seven weeks' fast, called the great fast; and, thirdly, Easter itself. In the great world of Saint Petersburgh, the approach of the great fast is announced by balls and convivial revels coming fast and furious, even as early as February; for the mass of the people, the sports and

* See note 18.

pastimes, with which they take leave of roast beef, and other pleasures, are all pressed into the butter week.' 'The upper classes resort, more particularly at this time, to the theatres, which are open morning and evening. The great masked ball takes place in this week, and every possible amusement is thronged,' 'and all seem eager to drain the last drop in the cup of dissipation, until the hour of twelve strikes, and proclaims the beginning of the fast ; every dance ceases, and all depart to their homes.' 'The fast then commences, and is kept strictly by all classes. Many persons are said to taste nothing during the last three days of Passion Week.' 'Then comes Easter, and never are the hospitals so full as after that week of feasting, and no month in the year registers so many deaths as April.''"—*Russia, by Kohl, c. 20, &c.*

Whether annual and obligatory fasts be held in the Russian or Romish churches, the results are precisely the same. Both communions *before* the fast are immersed in every species of dissipation, and *after* it each equally resume their national excesses, and the midnight of Saturday, in the holy week, ushers in scenes of profanity and revelry unknown in protestant countries, where Easter Sunday is kept in the simple spiritual manner which the gospel alone acknowledges to be Christian.

But Mahometans, Papists, and Greeks, are far outdone by Hindoos in their deeds of fasting, mortification and self-inflicted tortures. Numbers of Brahmins and Fakirs, professing the deepest piety, observe extraordinary fasts and frightful sufferings. Many of these deluded creatures are conscientious in their desire to gain the favour of Deity, not only by enduring voluntary torments, but by offering themselves as victims before

the car of their God, whilst, in other cases, Asiatics, like Europeans, understand that an *appearance* of peculiar sanctity brings its own reward in the *substantial* favours and admiration of those who are imposed upon by pharisaical exhibitions of devotion, which neither amend the hearts nor reform the morals of the hypocritical devotees.

But if there be great recompense in heaven for those who fast twice in the week upon the allowed dainties of fish, fruit, wine, &c. &c., what may not the Hindoos expect to receive, whose merit does not consist in refraining from specified meats, on occasional days, but who, from religious principle, never eat animal food ?

There are millions of people in India who, during the whole of their existence, taste nothing which has ever had life.* Those who live almost entirely upon rice, may certainly be deemed abstemious, and if virtues carried to excess and injury be entitled to a crown of glory, the worshippers of Brahma, with their tortures, self-denial, and fasts, will assuredly secure the highest reward. But with all these self-righteous attainments, what measure of purity, truth, or honesty, do even the highest castes practice ?

There is neither religious nor moral benefit derived from such abstinence and mortifications as are observed by Mussulmen, Romanists, or Heathens : they all agree in attributing much merit to their performances, but no good results are ever seen to arise from them in any country. Every external service rendered to God, which is not the genuine offspring of humble penitence or grateful love, is a vain oblation.

Our gracious Lord and Master, who understood the

* See note 19.

physical powers of men, left no arbitrary laws as to meats and drinks, times and seasons, for his disciples to follow. If, in the east, it might be but a slight inconvenience to hold an ordinary fast, in consequence of the temperature being sufficiently high to assist in keeping up the strength of the body by the outward heat, without nourishment for a considerable period, in colder climates it would be impossible for *industrious* nations to exist under perpetually repeated abstinence.* A certain quantity of food is absolutely necessary for the health and strength of man: he who indulges his appetite beyond a proper limit, weakens and degrades the powers of body and mind, whilst he who fasts in an excessive degree entirely loses the use of both; *moderation* is the happy mean between each defect, for *idleness* must be the result of either extreme. It is invariably seen that, in countries where the population is obliged by their religion to fast, the people are listless and indolent; the continual round of fasts and feasts (for one creates the other) causes a general love of ease and dissipation, which other circumstances cannot conquer.

Protestants who do not follow the injurious custom of fasting, are just as often nationally laborious and indefatigable; he who does much work must eat; he who may not eat must live with little exertion. Whilst ascetics err egregiously in supposing that "God who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not," can be pleased with the wretchedness of body and mind super-induced by fasting, it is just as possible for others to sin in the opposite extreme. A person, without being an Epicurean, may indulge in luxuries, not only at table, but in many various ways, from which Christians, pro-

* See Liebeg on Animal Heat.

fessing godliness, ought to forbear. The different ranks and degrees, appointed by providential arrangement, demand different modes of living, whilst, at the same time, none should permit himself the enjoyment of what is unsuitable to his station or means, nor what he cannot amply afford to spend without infringing upon the absolutely necessary wants of both his neighbour and the heathen, for whilst Saint Paul says, “Rejoice always,” and “trust but in the living God, who *giveth us all things richly to enjoy*,”* he forgets not to write, “Let your *moderation* be known unto all men.”†

The encouragement given to fasting and the applause awarded to the greatest fasters, caused innumerable persons to aspire to distinction by perpetual and severe abstinence, which, in many cases, ended in death, and these religious suicides attained the honour of beatification, in their church, for no better reason than having voluntarily injured their faculties, wasted their time, and died of starvation. *Such* saints were held in great esteem when living, and were to be remembered, as examples, when dead. There were others, such as martyrs and confessors, *deserving* of all respect, who were classed with monks and hermits, numbers of whom had days appointed in *honour* of their memories, and in later and more corrupt times to their *worship*, and this *once* innocent celebration of the interesting anniversary of a holy man’s martyrdom only too soon gave rise to what was called the commemoration of saints, and which days were kept with ~~much~~ greater sanctity than the *Lord’s* Day. The first day of the week, which had become the Christian ~~Sabbath~~, was the only time kept holy by the apostles and primitive Christians, and this is the

* 1 Tim. vi. 17. † Phil. iv. 5.



more worthy of attention, when it is recollected the apostles were all Jews by birth and education, who had tenaciously respected forms and seasons with scrupulous regularity, but their Divine Master had taught them a “more excellent way,” and that henceforth a perfect law of liberty was to be established, and those rites and ceremonies abolished “which have, indeed, a *show of* will worship, and *humidity*, and neglecting the body; *not* in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.”* The birth and death, the resurrection and ascension, of the Lord Jesus Christ, are certainly the most important events which have taken place since the creation, and their results were as highly appreciated and as clearly understood by those who wrote and “spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,” as by others who had no such gifts, yet even these anniversaries are never alluded to as occasions for either fasting or feasting, nor for any kind of observance. The Lord’s supper was instituted to preserve the remembrance of “his cross and passion,” and “to show forth his death till he come,” but there is no authority left to councils and hierarchies to inflict upon the church a perpetual series of hardships, not required by either the letter or spirit of the gospel.

Yet it is highly useful and desirable to have public religious recognition of those four great incidents above referred to, which bear so deeply upon the eternal interests of mankind, and the services appointed by the Church of England are most appropriate and devotional for each occasion, but to keep them with the pageantry and pantomime of the Greek and Roman Churches is a desecration of holy Christian solemnities.

* *Colos.* ii. 23.

Those communions which do not observe those festivals must not be blamed, as they are adhering strictly to the apostolical and scriptural rule of holding no commemorations. Saint Paul leaves all such matters as indifferent; yet he asks the Galatians, (iv. 9,) “ How turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire to be in bondage? Ye observe *days*, and *months*, and *times*, and *years*. *I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.*” And writing to the Romans (14) upon the same subject, he nowhere desires them to keep days, but to live in amity and peace.

Before the conclusion of the lives of Saint John and Saint Paul, Stephen and James had become martyrs for the truth; much is said of the former, yet there is no intimation of a saint’s day being instituted in his honour, but if such things had been advised and approved by the apostles, Saint Paul, above all people, ought to have done this justice to the memory of one whom he was instrumental in persecuting to death, but nothing is said of a commemoration. Was Saint Paul less holy and wise or more ignorant of God’s will, than the Nicene fathers, who instituted saints’ days, and got up all sorts of *pious frauds*, to the honour of the saints and the interest of *themselves*? * Such things were quite unknown in the first century; why should each or any of them be enforced in the nineteenth?

Those nations, either in the east or west, which have kept fasts and feasts, saints’ days, and commemorations of every imaginable kind, have not done so much credit, either morally or intellectually, to their religion, as to make them objects of envy or emulation to others who

* Augustine, at Hippo, with relics, said to be those of the Proto-Martyr Stephen.—See *Ancient Christianity*, No. 7, p. 322.

avoid merely traditional observances. The only day which is considered a fast, in England, is Good Friday, and, in Scotland, not even that one is set apart for such a purpose, yet there is not the slightest doubt that those two countries, which follow the theory and practice of Christ and his apostles, and neither institute nor encourage fasting, celibacy, or monastic establishments, are the most highly religious, moral, benevolent, and intellectual people in the whole world.

“ A tree is known by its fruits.”

N O T E S.

NOTE 1, PAGE 3.

There are three cases of long abstinence recorded in the Scriptures. Moses was on Mount Sinai forty days and forty nights, and did neither eat nor drink; (Ex. xxxiv. 28,) there was no privation felt by him, for when he descended to the plain his appearance was too glorious to be borne without a veil, which proves that he was not in a state of suffering.

When Elijah was on Mount Horeb, for the same length of time, it was not to keep a fast, for an angel had *twice* shown him the food, ready prepared for his use, which he was to eat to give him strength. (1 Kings xix. 6.) When Christ went into the desert "to be tempted," it was not a want of food which was to be his trial, for he felt no need of any, for the sacred writers explicitly state that, "*when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered.*" (Matt. iv. 2.) And Saint Luke says, "*And in these days he did eat nothing; and when they were ended, he afterward hungered.*" (iv. 2.)

NOTE 2, PAGE 4.

When Christ taught his disciples to pray, it must be concluded that he meant exactly what he said, and that none of the petitions to be presented to God were for unnecessary

things, but to men who are isolated from their fellow-creatures and shut out from mankind, two-thirds of that inestimable form of sacred words is null and void. To him who roamed alone in the desert there was no meaning in "thy kingdom come," for "the kingdoms of this world and of his Christ" were little to one who knew nothing of them and cared for none but himself. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," was an empty phrase on the lips of him who had no will but his own, and who, wrapt in his imagined sanctity, merely exhibited his head through an aperture in the wall of his tomb or den to the gaze of some equally ignorant fanatic, and who, by neglecting the use of every faculty of body and mind, set at nought the whole end of his existence. "Give us day by day our daily bread," could not be repeated by the person who deemed it his highest duty to abstain from food, as it would have been a mockery to ask for that which he had resolved to go without. "Lead us not into temptation" if said, could expect no answer, for the few who indulged themselves by writing their own biographies, assure their readers that, in their state of fasting, solitude, and mortification, they were tossed by every wind of passion and every aspect of sin, and that the condition in which they voluntarily placed themselves and continued in, put them into the possession of demons. Such men could not wish to be delivered "from evil," as they persisted in a course of life which was a perpetual scene of misery, sin, and desolation; they "sowed the storm and reaped the whirlwind."

NOTE 3, PAGE 4.

The *only* occasion on which Christ fasted is stated by Matt. 4, Mark 1, Luke 4. The same detail is given by the three evangelists, and no other instance is recorded in Scripture of the Lord fasting.

The following passages serve to show his usual and general

manner of life:—Matt. ix. 10, 11. “And it came to pass as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your master with publicans and sinners?”—Mark ii. 15, Luke v. 29.

Matt. xi. 19. “The son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.” Luke vii. 34.

Matt. xii. 1 to 5. “At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn and to eat,” &c. Mark ii. 23, Luke vi. 1.

Matt. xiv. 15 to 21. “Jesus said to them, give ye them to eat. And they did all eat and were filled.” Luke ix. 12, John vi. 5 to 13.

Matt. xv. 32 to 38. “Jesus said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me these three days, and have nothing to eat. And they did all eat and were filled.” Mark viii. 1.

Matt. xvi. 5. “And when his disciples were come unto the other side, they had forgotten to take bread.” Mark viii. 14.

Matt. xxi. 18, 19. “He hungered, and when he saw a fig-tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon,” &c. Mark xi. 12, 13.

Matt. xxvi. 6 to 13. “Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon, the leper, as he sat at meat.” Mark xiv. 3.

Mark v. 43. “And commanded that something should be given her to eat.”

John iv. 8. “For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.”

Luke v. 33. “Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the pharisees; but thine eat and drink?” Matt. ix. 14; Mark ii. 18.

Luke xiv. 1. "And it came to pass as he went into the house of one of the chief of the pharisees to eat bread." Luke xix. 1 to 7 of Zaccheus.

Luke x. 38 to 42. "Martha was cumbered about much serving."

John xii. 2. "There they made him a supper, and Martha served; but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him."

Luke xxiv. 30 to 43. "And it came to pass as he sat at meat with them."

Luke xxiv. 41, 42, 43. "And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye any meat? And they gave him a piece of broiled fish and an honeycomb. And he took and did eat before them."

John xxi. 4 to 13. "Jesus said, have ye any meat. Jesus then cometh and taketh bread and giveth them and fish likewise."

Matt. xv. 11. "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man."

Luke x. 7, 8. "And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give; and into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you."

Luke xi. 8. "Give us day by day our daily bread." Matt. vi. 11. See John ii.

NOTE 4, PAGE 23.

"Moreover when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites of a sad countenance." "But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face." Matt. vi. 16, 17. These words, spoken by Christ to the "multitudes of people," contained an entirely new doctrine to those whose fasts were conspicuous and outward manifestations of religion or sorrow. The Lord taught that, in future, there were to be no public exhibitions of indi-

vidual fasting, and no *appearance* of self-denial to others, but that, whoever chose to fast, was to do it in secret, when none but God could know or see. (18.) When the people were told they were to anoint themselves as if for a feast, the thing was evidently annulled, or completely changed in its nature, for amongst the Jews the universal custom was that a person fasting must not even wash. They *never anointed* themselves in seasons of grief or humiliation, but frequently for other purposes, or as a mark of blessedness or exaltation. The Psalmist says, “Thou anointest my head with oil.” (xxiii. 5.) Lightfoot states that the Jews were wont to anoint themselves for three reasons—for finer dress—for the healing of some disease—for a magical and superstitious act, but in *no* instance was it ever used in token of distress or penitence. When Christ was anointed (Matt. xxvi. 12) he said, “She did it for *my* burial,” which was the time of *His* triumph, for *then* “he put all things under his feet,” and “carried captivity captive.”

NOTE 5, PAGE 12.

Easter and Good Friday were unknown till *sometime* in the second century. The Asiatic churches follow the Mosaic ritual as to the time of their keeping Easter. The Passover was always held on the fourteenth day of the moon, and the Oriental Christians still continue the practice of Easter being on this day of the month, without regard to the day of the week, so that, although the commemoration of the crucifixion may fall occasionally on a Friday, it more generally happens on other days.

The Christian churches have a different mode of calculating the return of the festival, which they have fixed to be always on the Sunday after the fourteenth day of the March moon, when that moon shall be after the vernal equinox. As even the chronology of Christ's birth is not settled by from

four to ten years, it becomes utterly impossible to state in what year, or on what day of the month, he died (as the season of the Passover changes according to the moon), but as the evangelists say our Lord rose from the dead on "the third day" after his burial, and on "the first day of the week," his death must have been on the day we call Friday, and his resurrection on Sunday.

NOTE 6, PAGE 31.

In the thirteenth century, *foreign clergy alone* received annually from England more than seventy thousand marks. The revenues of the king scarcely amounted to a *third* of that sum. Before the mortmain act was passed, the clergy and monks had acquired nearly one half the landed property of this kingdom, and obtained a larger share in some European states.—*Hallam's Middle Ages*, v. 2, c. 7.

NOTE 7, PAGE 32.

" 'This is a madman !' said Sir Kenneth ;
' Not the worse saint,' replied the Moslem."

The Talisman.

Anthony is accounted the founder of monasticism, and considered a perfect paragon of a saint. It may be concluded that his learning was not very profound, as (his biographer, Saint Austin, states) he did not know a letter of the alphabet, and, in consequence of this, it is not probable that his knowledge of the writings of prophets and apostles was very extensive. The only food Anthony took was bread and water; he never ate before sun-set; sometimes only once in two or three days; he laid at night on rushes spread on the floor; his under-garment was sackcloth, and over it he wore a sheep-skin, which he wore till his dying day; *he never washed himself!*

Between his hours of prayer his only occupation was plaiting the leaves of the palm-tree, which employment he had been taught by an angel sent down from heaven for that purpose, who, by way of encouraging Anthony to learn *anything*, said, "Do this and thou shalt be saved." The reasoning powers of the famished saint were not very strong, or the thought might have possibly struck him that, if making mats were a sufficient means of securing his salvation, there could be no necessity for him to spend his whole life in misery, as the angelic visitant promised no reward for all his prayers and fasts, but merely mentioned that his future bliss depended upon his weaving palm leaves together. The readers of the lives of such saints as Anthony, will perceive that the professed object of their retirement from the world was defeated, for instead of their time being devoted to meditation and uninterrupted worship of God, it was almost entirely consumed in combatting devils, and in subduing temptations of *every* kind which haunted them as a legion, and which the benevolently active Christian in this protestant country does not even dream of as possible.

The saints of the desert all followed the vocation of working miracles upon men or "*dragons*," as might happen to present themselves. Perpetual solitude, with fasting and self-inflicted tortures, seem generally to have caused paroxysms of derangement, which easily accounts for their visions of demons or houris. A protracted deprivation of food must always produce in a greater or lesser degree, the same results upon the human frame. The effects of it are seen in cases of shipwreck, when, from hunger, even the light-minded French become frantic cannibals, and the more resolute-hearted and robust English seamen die after a time in agonies and delirium; for Liebeg states that long protracted privation from food causes oxidation of the brain, which must necessarily produce incurable insanity.

NOTE 8, PAGE 32.

It is not intended to say that Anthony was the *inventor* of the monastic system, but that he was the founder of it in the Christian church. The thing itself had been known in the world from time immemorial, and is spoken of in earliest eastern history. Wherever Budhism has taken root, and wherever that religion is established, there are numerous monasteries. The similarity between Romanist and Budhist convents is so great, that the papal missionaries to Thibet did not scruple to say they were instituted, by Satan, to spread the heathenish creed, he having seen the efficacy of the Benedictine rule in diffusing the opinions of the church. In other and more polished countries Pythagoras commenced at a later period (500 years before Christ) his system of philosophy, to which great numbers were attracted on the supposition that, by a course of mortification and austerity, they might, at last, see the gods. The discipline, observed by this sect, was most severe ; silence was enforced upon each person for the first five years ; no animal food was eaten, and only undressed vegetables allowed. Water was their sole beverage. There was an absolute rule for every hour, for both the actions of the body and the emotions of the mind. Marriage was discouraged. In one thing the pagans had greatly the advantage of the Christian Monks, for they insisted that the gods only accepted those who came to them with *clean* bodies in *clean* white garments.

NOTE 9, PAGE 35.

The vestal virgins of ancient Rome were more happily circumstanced than those of papal Rome ; the former took the vows for thirty years, but might renounce them at *any time*, and instead of being immured in a politely named gaol called a

convent, they were accustomed to visit the theatres and public shows, where they had the most conspicuous and honourable places assigned to them; and they likewise appeared in the triumphal processions.

If during their time of residence as vestals they broke their vows, a punishment awaited them, similar to that which their mother, *the church*, thought fit in later days to inflict upon her votaries for such a delinquency; *they were walled up alive* in a vault, with the mockery of bread and water placed by them.

On the day on which the veil is taken by a nun, and her irrevocable vows pronounced, she is, by way of distinction, called “The spouse of Christ.” This appellation is as profane as it is unscriptural; “the bride, the Lamb’s wife,” (Rev. xxi. 9.) are epithets *never* applied to any *one individually*, but always used collectively. Saint Paul, writing to the Corinthian *church* “and *all* the saints in Achaia,” says, “I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” (2 Cor. xi. 2.) During the rejoicings in heaven upon the fall of Babylon, Saint John writes, “the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready,” (19) for Saint Paul had before stated that Christ also had loved the church and gave himself for it, “that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle.” (Eph. v. 25, 27). These verses prove that no *one* person can, at any time or in any sense appropriate the name of “spouse,” for, in every passage the term signifies a large number in the aggregate to be presented faultless in heaven, not on earth, so that no solitary victim of enthusiasm or compulsion can ever be styled “the spouse” without gross error and presumption.

NOTE 10, PAGE 38.

The order of the Stylites commenced about A.D. 427. Ano-

ther canonized Simon of this species was an Englishman named Simon Stark, who flourished many years as a resident in the decayed trunk of a tree. As the climate of this country is less hospitable than that of Asia, he wisely chose an umbrageous sanctuary as his place of holy seclusion, and by the extraordinary merit of retiring into such a sylvan dwelling, he has been deemed worthy of a name amongst the saints in the Romish calendar.

NOTE 11, PAGE 39.

The Anchorets, who resided on and around Mount Sinai, passed the whole week in the seclusion of their cells until the evening of Saturday, when they assembled in the church, and continued all the night in prayer. On the morning of Sunday they received the Lord's Supper, and then each useless mortal returned to the place from whence he came, again to resume his course of inane existence.

The whole design and nature of the Gospel seems to have been forgotten by the advocates of monkery; they teach that the more wretched, silent, and recluse a man can become, the more holy he is esteemed by God, and that the devotees who live in the deepest solitudes, undergoing self-inflicted tortures, and severe privations, are only a *little* lower than the angels. The condition of angelic beings is that of perfect purity and sinlessness; whether monks who, by their *own accounts*, were perpetually in the company of demons, and who never either washed or changed their garments, were very similar in any point to the spirits before the throne, is not worth questioning. Their *personal habits* might be a matter of taste, which cleanly English protestants cannot quite appreciate, whilst they may be permitted to judge between the state of *mind* cultivated and applauded in monastic institutions, and that which is recom-

mended in Scripture. In the former it is invariably maintained, that the more entirely forlorn, unhappy, and tempted a man can be rendered, the more worthy he is to be exalted above his fellow-creatures in heaven, and to be canonized on earth. The sacred writings give a very different and opposite view of the Christian's duty. Instead of an endless miserere, Saint Paul, says, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice." *

Everything in heaven is represented by inspiration of God as exquisitely white and clean, † but the clothing of the holiest monkish saints is continually *celebrated* as being ragged and filthy in the extreme. The heavenly hosts are in countless multitudes, and hallelujahs proceed from the voices of "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;" there are no solitaries in heaven. If men, when in their state of probation here below are expected to be preparing the spirit of their minds for a condition of superior existence above, monks of all grades and orders will be the *last* to participate in the joys of heaven, as from their previous training they cannot have one congenial feeling with its *pure, happy, social* inhabitants. Yet *Childe England* advises the re-establishment of monastic institutions in this country !

NOTE 12, PAGE 40.

In the eighth century, the Caliph Almanum was distinguished by his patronage of letters. "The philosophical writings of Greece were eagerly sought and translated; the stars were numbered, the course of the planets was measured; Europe received from the Saracens the numerical figures and intellectual language of algebra."—*Hallam's Middle Ages*, v. 2, p. 172. "The royal library of the Fatamites consisted of a hundred thousand manuscripts, elegantly transcribed, and splendidly

* Phil. iv. 4. † Rev. xv. 6; xix. 8; v. 11.

bound, which were lent without jealousy or avarice to the students at Cairo. Yet this collection seems moderate, if we can believe that the Omniae of Spain had formed a library of *six* hundred thousand volumes; above 70 libraries were opened in the Andalusian kingdom."—(Gibbon, l. 53.) Yet, at the beginning of the tenth century, books were so scarce amongst *Christians* in *Spain*, that *one and the same* copy of the Bible, Saint Jerome's epistles, and some other volumes of ecclesiastical offices and martyrologies often served *several* monasteries. The writings of the Greek authors were chiefly made known by Latin translations from the Arabic.

NOTE 13, PAGE 42.

"Chivalry, or (as Dr. Arnold more frequently used to call the element in the middle ages which he condemned) feudalism is especially Celtic and *barbarian*, incompatible with the highest virtue of which man is capable and the last at which he arrives, *a sense of justice*. It sets up the personal allegiance to the chief, above allegiance to God and the law." Whatever laws were made to regulate the order of chivalry, they were, in all *essential* points Utopian, and though this system might be an improvement upon the reckless barbarism which generally prevailed, yet it only served to strengthen the fetters of feudal bondage, and became an apology for every species of violence and crime. Sir Walter Scott justly observes, "That the genius of the order tended to render the zeal of the professors of chivalry fierce, burning, and intolerant." Their first appearance in England, at the Conquest, may suffice to show the honour, honesty, and moral worth of its principles and conduct. It remained for protestant England to show the "very perfect knight" in the person of Sir Philip Sidney.

NOTE 14, PAGE 43.

Urban's indulgence was not only full absolution for all sin, but likewise a receipt for ecclesiastical censures and penances which might be due. This novel mode of securing a place in heaven was most acceptable to Europe, for by it the monk became freed from the discipline of his convent; the debtors were no longer to be sued by their creditors; felons and criminals of every kind, by taking the cross, could elude the laws, for *all* who went to the crusades were cleansed from sin and every moral obligation by the power of the papal indulgence.

NOTE 15, PAGE 43.

Peter the Hermit had visited the Holy Land, and had shared the distresses and insults which Mussulmen inflicted upon the devotees who went there; he had doubtless, on his pilgrimage, gone through the usual prescribed course of saintly duty and *fasting*, and returned to Europe in the full odour of sanctity, but in after years, at the protracted siege of Antioch, when the whole army was reduced to the severest hardships and privations, from famine, Peter thought fit to leave the crusaders! There could be no credit gained when thousands of men were *all* equally suffering, for the *merit* of fasting is not when it is borne with fortitude, in poverty, or other unavoidable circumstances, but when it is a work of supererogation.

It must not be supposed that admiration of the madness of Anthony, the contemptible absurdities of the Simons, or the wild fanaticism of Peter the Hermit, was confined to a few solitary and ignorant enthusiasts like themselves. Much wiser men than those, seeing that such extremes dazzled the vulgar and superstitious of all classes, not only countenanced but embraced in a measure their opinions, and followed their practices.

Saint Bernard (the last of “the Fathers”) not only became a monk, but persuaded great numbers of persons to take monastic vows, and retire into the deepest solitude of the cloister, whilst the saint mingled largely, and acted conspicuously, in that world which he had professed to abandon and eschew for ever; he also preached a triumphant crusade throughout France and Germany, summoning all to the defence of the holy sepulchre, and was so successful in his enlistments that he boasted “that cities and castles were depopulated and emptied of their inhabitants, so that the proportion left in them was but as one man to seven women.”

It is believed that two millions of men fell in these wars, which were proclaimed and encouraged entirely by *the church*, which professes to be His who said, “My *peace* I leave with you.” Saint Bernard not only partook of the opinions, but the habits of the monastic orders, for in a famous discourse in praise of the knights templars, amongst other questionable excellencies he goes on to mention, “they are never combed, seldom washed, but rather appear with rough neglected hair, foul with dust,” &c., &c.

NOTE 16, PAGE 45.

From the sixth to the eleventh century is the time generally called “the dark ages,” but the term may be justly applied to the fourteenth. Alfred complained that the clergy did not understand the Latin prayers they repeated, and, in Dunstan’s time, none of them knew that language. It was not possible that the public mind could be improved, when there were no means used to diffuse knowledge, and there could be no *readers* when there were no writers and no books. Every considerable abbey had a scriptorium, which was appropriated to the use of composers or transcribers, and several millions of monks *might*

have written, every year, innumerable works, if they had been so inclined. But when the seats of learning were without books and libraries, it could not be supposed the people at large possessed any. A.D. 1300, the academical library, at Oxford, consisted of a few tracts, kept in chests, under Saint Mary's Church. Glastonbury Abbey, the largest and richest foundation in England, contained, in its library, 400 volumes, but none other in *that* age was so numerous or valuable.

Louis the Ninth established a public library in Paris, and, in the fourteenth century, it contained only four classical MS.S.

In the same century, Bury, Chancellor of England, paid the abbot of Saint Alban's *fifty pounds weight of silver* for between thirty and forty volumes. Before the general use of printing, books, from their scarcity, were of such high price, that it was impracticable for any but the rich to obtain them, and *no effort* was made by the learned to increase their circulation or promote the diffusion of knowledge. Italy first began the study of classical literature, but Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Dante, were not monks. For many centuries it was rare for a layman of *any* rank to read; their charters, till the use of seals were known, were subscribed with a cross, and it was not till the end of the fourteenth century a few signatures appeared. It is believed that Charlemagne could not write; the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa could not read; neither could John, King of Bohemia, in the fourteenth century; nor could Philip the Hardy, King of France, although the son of Saint Louis.

In almost every council the ignorance of the clergy formed a subject of reproach. In one held A. D. 992, it was asserted that scarcely a single person in Rome itself knew the first elements of letters. Not one priest in a thousand could address a common letter to another. Friar Bacon, who flourished in the thirteenth century, said he only knew two good mathematicians among his contemporaries. The popular poem of *Piers Plowman* in the fourteenth century, is entirely directed against the world.

liness, *ignorance*, and indolence of the clergy. Yet these are the times which we are now called upon to admire and reverence for their purity, spirituality, and knowledge !

NOTE 17, PAGE 49.

In the college of the Rue Saint Jacques, the Jesuits met and conspired to murder their king. It was there sixteen of the order signed an absolute cession of the kingdom of France to the crown of Spain, and there Clement received his instructions to assassinate Henry the Third, which he accomplished in 1587.

The Jesuits were banished from France for murder and sedition, but this society had always within itself ready tools both to instigate and execute their criminal designs ; they arranged the plot to kill Henry the Fourth, which was often frustrated, but, at length, Ravaillac succeeded in effecting the long-concerted regicide ; he first received *absolution* from a priest, who forgave a *premeditated sin* of the deepest dye, and then he went in the strength of *such innocence*, and stabbed his sovereign, whose offences were not his personal vices, but allowing his protestant subjects to remain unpersecuted.

The Jesuits have written books to prove the propriety of putting to death such monarchs as would not suppress all religion but that taught by the Romish church. A work, by Mariana (*De Rege et Regis Institutione*) calls the murder of these kings “a laudable, glorious, and meritorious action.”

At one time, the Jesuits (who are all sworn to keep the vow of poverty) were the greatest traders in the world. It is believed there were twenty thousand of them scattered abroad in all countries, apparently as single mercantile houses, but, in reality, parts of a great whole, under the control of *one* person, called the general of the order. Each individual seemed to be acting for himself as a merchant, whilst his actual object was

not so much to increase the wealth of "the society of Jesus," as to advance, without exciting suspicion, the power and influence of the order (which was often at variance with the pope's, who beheld, with jealousy, their encroachments on the church.) Whether the pursuit and gaining of immense wealth were compatible with the vow of poverty taken by *every* member of the fraternity it is needless to ask, for those who break all the laws of God, cannot be expected to adhere to their own when inconvenient.

In Paraguay the Jesuits meant to form an independent sovereignty, and the life of the King of Portugal was attempted to prevent his power being acknowledged by his subjects in South America.

Time would fail us to tell of the proceedings of the most systematically infamous (yet educated and refined) class of men that ever wore the mask of Christianity; yet this order is again springing up; the evils which they invariably bring have still to be felt anew, but are certain to arise, for they never change their immoral creed, their secular object, nor their love of power.

NOTE 18, PAGE 52.

In the profligate reign of Louis the Fourteenth, it was a common practice for the most dissipated women of the court to retire for a week to some convent, where they went through a course of fasting and prayer, confession, and *absolution*, and having, by this short season of pharisaical sanctity, conveniently cleared off, according to the law of *their* church, their old sins, they returned to their place, in the splendid circle, again to resume their former immoralities.

If a superabundance of clergy, with *monks* and nuns, could render the population of a country holy, France should have been a perfect example of orthodox godliness, for, on the break-

ing out of the revolution, in 1793, there were *four hundred thousand* individuals whose sole profession and vocation was religion and devotion to the *interests* of the Romish church.

Yet, with nearly half a million of fasting celibates to direct and guide their souls, the whole mass of the people were infidels, and no heathen nation ever exhibited such a lack of *moral* virtue as that fearful period displayed.

NOTE 19, PAGE 54.

The Hindoos have twelve kinds of fasts. Twenty-nine times in the year each person *must* fast for a whole day and night, without tasting food or liquid. Occasionally the fast must be for three days and three nights. In extreme cases of mortification, the same degree of abstinence must be observed for twelve days and twelve nights.

